

Who Was Marie Dupont?

By ADELE LUEHRMANN

CHAPTER X

HUGH SENIOR laughed. "If those stones were real, they would be worth a fortune."

"They look real."

"What are you talking about, Amaranth?" Hugh took the necklace from the other's hand and examined it with frowning eyes. "Real? Look at the size of them—those pearls, for instance!"

"Oh, they're not valuable: only baroque. But the emeralds—"

"Emeralds? Green glass! And these colorless stones—surely you don't dream that they are diamonds! They are not brilliant enough."

"That might be the way they are cut," Guy ventured doubtfully. "I may be mistaken. I—I hope I am."

"I'm sure you are. Paris is full of imitation jewelry—very clever some of it is too."

"You never asked her about it, you say?"

"No. I have never even told Mrs. Thorley that I have it. Does that strike you as odd? Well, I didn't see either one of them for a year after the accident: not until the following summer. At first I expected my aunt to write me that the necklace had been asked for; but she never did. When I went over I took it with me. I intended to give it to Marie. It belonged to her; besides I thought it might rouse her memory. But when I saw her—well, somehow I couldn't bring myself to do it. It's such a tawdry affair, so unlike her, that I couldn't bear the idea of her connecting herself with it, as she would have done."

"And you have never shown it to anyone?"

"Never."

Amarinth hesitated. "Would you object to an expert examining it?" he finally brought out.

"You're not convinced?" Hugh asked with a keen glance at him.

"I want to be sure that you're right, that's all. Of course I don't see how it could be real—"

"It couldn't be—it's impossible. But I think you have a right to reassure yourself. The only condition I make is that you do not mention my name or Marie's in the matter."

"Certainly not."

Hugh held out the necklace, remarking as Amaranth took it from him, "Did you notice that there seems to have been some sort of pendant attached to that middle cluster? It looks as if it had been broken off, doesn't it?"

Guy nodded. "Could it have happened in the accident, do you think?"

"I don't know. If it had fallen off then, it is reasonable to suppose that it would have been found inside her clothes when the doctor examined her. But it was not."

Guy wrapped the necklace again and put it into a pocket. "I will return it as soon as possible," he said. "I'll take it to Rice & Lozier—I know them there."

"Yes, they're all right, I dare say."

The door closed, and Hugh sank back into his chair.

"Suppose he's right? Suppose it is real?" he muttered.

IN the brain of young Amaranth the same thoughts pounded as he made his way to the street. He felt bewildered. Crises had been few in his well ordered existence. Never had he faced one that, like this, threatened to wrench him from his comfortable moorings. Life had always seemed simple enough,—if a chap had the right traditions and thought straight, he couldn't go wrong. But now—

"Don't marry a woman that you will have to explain!"

His mother's advice had always seemed to cover the ground. Explain to one's friends, to society, had been its meaning.



SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

GUY AMARANTH, very much in love with a young girl of his acquaintance, Marie Dupont, one night persuades her to run away from a ball and marry him. They have hardly concluded this impulsive act when Amaranth discovers to his dismay that his young wife has had a very ambiguous past.

From her guardian, Hugh Senior, he learns that Marie's real identity is unknown. Seven years before Senior was motoring early one morning in Paris when he accidentally ran down a girl in the street. He carried her to his aunt's home, and in a day or two she recovered; but she had lost all memory of her life up to the time of the accident. No inquiries could unearth her identity. She was dressed at the time as a Paris working girl; but round her neck was a curious necklace, apparently of paste. Senior and his aunt, feeling responsible for the girl's situation, adopted her and called her Marie Dupont.

Young Amaranth is disagreeably affected by this revelation. Mysterious hints have already come to him that Marie resembles a professional dancer of not too flawless reputation, who used to dance in Paris cafés. When Senior shows him the necklace that was found on Marie's neck Amaranth declares that the stones are genuine.

What would she have said to a girl whom one could not explain even to oneself?

The story he had just heard struck him as utterly fantastic. That it should be the story of a girl he even knew was incredible enough, but that the girl should be his wife!

His problem was not so simple as Hugh Senior supposed. He could not honorably advance or retreat, as he chose. A retreat was still possible; but only through the painful process of an annulment.

The thought of it caused him a swift physical recoil. He wheeled and started up the street, and the bodily activity brought with it a mental impulse. He would go straight to Gavock.

What a different aspect the latter's encounter with Marie now presented! How damnably it dovetailed with what he had since learned! Gavock had said he had mistaken her for someone he had known in Paris, someone now dead. Well, Marie had been in Paris, and no doubt to all her former acquaintances must now

be counted as dead. But had Gavock spoken the truth? Did he really believe himself mistaken? And even so, was he mistaken?

The thought suggested to Guy his wisest course of action. If Gavock believed himself to have been mistaken, misled by a resemblance, he would probably talk freely. If he had lied, he would of course have a plausible story ready to cover the lie. Well, the wonderful Paris police records had shattered many plausible stories!

Amarinth set his teeth hard, and the blood throbbed against his temples. He would be no man's fool! It was his right to know all that any man knew about this girl who was his wife.

GAVOCK'S hotel was the Crustacea; but Gavock was not there when Guy arrived. Nothing remained then to do but go at once to a jeweler's and return later. He would probably catch Gavock about luncheon time.

At Rice & Lozier's luxurious shop he was informed that the gem expert was at that moment not in, but that they had another man, a very good judge of stones.

Amarinth hesitated an instant. He would see the other man, he said.

He took the package from his pocket, and as he removed the paper wrapping he was conscious that his hands were trembling visibly. As the necklace slid on the mat placed for it he glanced up quickly.

The jeweler's eyes dilated suddenly. "Why!" he emitted in astonishment. He picked up the necklace and held it up before him where it caught the light fully, letting his glance travel slowly over its entire length. Twice he shifted his gaze for an instant to Amaranth.

"Do I understand that you wish to know the exact value of this?" he asked. Amaranth nodded.

"I could not say offhand, of course. That would require detailed examination. The piece is undoubtedly very old, and gem setters, particularly of the oriental countries, were likely to carry out color schemes regardless of the quality of the material they employed. Some of the stones may not be genuine. May I ask if it belongs to you?"

"No," Amaranth returned a trifle unsteadily. "I am considering buying it—as an antique. What I want to find out is its intrinsic value, quite apart from its value as an antique."

The man gave a short, odd laugh and looked at Amaranth curiously. "I should say that its value as an antique is practically nothing compared with its intrinsic value. All these larger stones seem to be genuine."

"Emeralds and diamonds?"

"Yes. If they were recut as we cut today, their brilliance would be multiplied a hundred times."

"Is it French?"

"French? Oh, no. The French have never conceived anything so strong or barbaric in style. Do you know its history?"

"No."

Once more Amaranth was conscious of surprised curiosity in the keen look that covered him in an instant.

"There seems to have been a pendant attached here at one time. It was broken off."

"Evidently," said Guy shortly, holding out his hand for the jewels.

The man appeared not to see the gesture. "Mr. Stanislas, our expert, will be able to appraise and classify it exactly for you. I hope you will wait, or perhaps leave it for him. It is a remarkable piece from any point of view. No doubt it has an interesting history. As to that also Mr. Stanislas could probably give you information. Most of the very fine old pieces have been described and their histories recorded."

"When will he return?" Guy asked.

"Within an hour, possibly."

"Is Mr. Lozier here? I'd like to see him."

The jeweler despatched a young salesman for Lozier, who presently appeared and greeted Amaranth cordially by name. He was an affable, white-haired little man.

"I have a necklace here that I should like to leave for your expert to appraise for me."

"Certainly. I will give you a receipt for it," said Lozier.

"That won't be necessary so long as I leave it in your hands," Guy said, adding as he turned away, "I'll return for it this afternoon."

He hurried away, hardly waiting for a reply. His head was spinning, the blood pounding in his veins. He drank in the cold outer air like a drunken man.

LOZIER put on his glasses and looked at the necklace. "Bless my soul!" he exclaimed.

"That young chap must have money to